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SUBJECT: REPORTS OF AGR-LINKED ILLEGAL MIGRANT DEPORTATIONS
IN TURKEY DISPELLED

¶1. (SBU) Summary and comment. Turkish-Armenian contacts representing business, religious and intellectual communities dispelled reports on a pan-Armenian web site suggesting that the Turkish government had detained approximately 100 illegal Armenian migrants in retaliation for the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee (HFAC) approval of the Armenian genocide resolution (AGR). One contact acknowledged unofficial reports of the detention of 50-60 illegal Armenian migrants but stated these individuals had been arrested four days prior to the HFAC vote. Some 70 thousand illegal Armenians reside in Turkey. Broad-based speculation on ways in which the Turkish Government might react if AGR passes in the full House extends to them as well. There is no indication that reports of current detentions, if true, are anything more than the unfortunate, coincidental timing of normal crack-down operations against illegal migrants in the same week as the HFAC vote on the AGR. End summary and comment.

¶2. (SBU) The independent Pan-Armenian Network NGO reported via its website panarmenian.net on October 15 that the Government of Turkey (GOT) had begun arresting Armenian citizens in retaliation for the October 10 HFAC approval of the AGR. The report cited an Irish Times article which allegedly stated some 100 illegal Armenian migrants had been detained in Turkey for subsequent deportation to their homeland and that "their deportation is viewed as revenge to adoption of the Armenian genocide resolution by the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee." The website further quoted Armenia's representative to the Istanbul-based Black Sea Economic Cooperation Karen Mirzoyan as having confirmed that Armenian citizens are being arrested in Turkey "with a purpose of deportation over violation of visa regime." Mirzoyan later told us he had been contacted by Radio liberty last week and was asked about the reported detentions, but noted he had no official information from his government related to the arrests. He indicated that the reported detentions were of illegal workers and unrelated to the AGR. He thanked us for our interest and committed to alert us if he becomes aware of any retaliatory acts against Armenian nationals as a result of the AGR.

¶3. (SBU) Luiz Bakar, an attorney for Armenian Patriarch of Turkey Mesrob II, told us on October 15 that she had heard unofficial reports that 50-60 illegal Armenian migrants were arrested on October 6 (four days prior to the HFAC vote) and were awaiting deportation in an Istanbul jail for foreigners. Bakar personally knew two Iranian Armenians who were facing deportation but there was nothing to suggest these actions were related to the HFAC vote, she said. Meanwhile the editor-in-chief of the Turkish-Armenian weekly newspaper Agos, Etyen Mahcupyan, told us that he had not heard of any arrests and deportations of illegal Armenian migrants.

Another Agos contact explained the government had begun detaining and deporting a few of Turkey's 70 thousand illegal Armenian migrants this summer but that these actions were not linked to the AGR. Nergis Ozturk, coordinator of Turkey-Armenia Business Development Council gave a similar account, stating her investigations revealed no Armenians on deck for deportation and that the recent crack-downs were non-discriminatory, applying to Armenians as much as any other foreigner in an illegal status in Turkey.

WIENER